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# WHAT STILL REMAINS TO BE DONE FOR THE SCOTTISH DIALECTS[1]

The Scottish Dialect Committee was appointed by the Council of the Scottish Branch of the English Association in December, 1907, 'to arrange for the collecting of materials in the Scottish Dialect.' It owes its origin, in great measure, to a suggestion made by Dr. Craigie, of Oxford, in an admirable address which he gave at Dundee in 1907 to the members of this Association upon 'What steps should be taken to secure Co-operation of Members in collecting Scottish Words, Ballads, Legends, and Traditions still current?' The original members of the Committee were: Dr. Scougal, H.M.C.I.S.; Mr. J. C. Smith, H.M.I.S.; Mr. Williams, Principal, Glasgow Training Centre; Mr. Grant (Convener), Aberdeen Training Centre. Amongst others who have since joined the Committee are Dr. Craigie, of the *New English Dictionary*, and Dr. Smith, Director of Studies, Aberdeen Training Centre.

The Committee held two meetings in 1908, for the purpose of defining their aims and methods. Although a full account of these aims and methods appeared in Bulletins 4 and 5 of the English Association, the present occasion is deemed a suitable one to embody them in a single statement, and to appeal for the sympathy and practical help of the members and the general public in what is really a national work.

With Dr. Craigie, the Committee believe that the field of 'ballad' and 'legend' has been pretty well gleaned. Other agencies, the Scottish Historical Society, the Scottish Text Society, the Spalding Club, &c., are at work on local history, tradition, and ancient Scottish Literature. The Committee are of opinion that there is still room for their efforts in an 'investigation into the present condition of the Scottish Dialects'. They would seek to make the record of our language as complete as possible, (1) by gathering in words, meanings, and usages which have not yet been recorded in any dictionary; (2) by an exact description of the pronunciation of

[1] An address delivered before the Scottish Branch of the English Association, March 27, 1909.

existing Scottish words; (3) by dividing the country into dialect areas corresponding to differences of pronunciation.

The work that the Committee propose to carry out is really a necessary contribution to a New Scottish Dictionary. Most people will admit the necessity for such a work. Scotsmen are under a deep debt of gratitude to Jamieson for his dictionary published just 101 years ago, but that must not blind us to the fact that it falls very far short of modern ideals. A dictionary of any pretensions must contain at least four elements: (1) all the words used in the language from the present time as far back as our literary records go; (2) the meanings and usages of these words, defined by phrase or quotation; (3) their pronunciation; (4) their etymology.

Now Jamieson's Dictionary was based on Central Scottish, and was, therefore, from the beginning, incomplete from the point of view of Vocabulary. Notwithstanding frequent and important additions and editions, it does not satisfy modern standards as an account of Scottish Speech. It hardly deals with pronunciation at all, and its etymology is that of an age when any one could set up as a philologist by gathering cognates *à coups de dictionnaire*, and making wild guesses depending on fancy or prejudice. In Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* many words not found in Jamieson have been noted, and Wright's correspondents have ransacked our more recent dialect literature for illustrative examples. However excellent Wright's work is in itself, we must remember that the Scottish portion was only part of a great whole, and could not, therefore, get the fullness and—in regard to the sounds—exactness of treatment which would be its lot in a national dictionary. The pronunciation of quite a large number of words has been indicated in a general way, but only in the case of comparatively few have the variants of the same word in different dialects been scientifically described. As, since 1603 at least, we have had no standard pronunciation for Scotch, these variants ought to be carefully recorded. Such a systematic account of the sounds used in the same words in different parts of the country will enable us to mark out with more precision than has hitherto been possible the dialect divisions within the Scottish area (perhaps throwing light on such historic questions as the settlement of Scotland by different tribes and nationalities), it will enable us to reconstruct with some certainty the spoken language of the past, and it will form a sure basis for the philological investigation of our native language, and will hence throw light upon the general development of English Speech. Scottish Philology is outside the province of the

Committee, but it is to be hoped that our Universities will some day, and soon, be in a position to equip students for a work which is worthy of our highest scholarship. It is curious to note that a young German student has just been made a doctor in Philology in the University of Bonn *magna cum laude*, for a thesis on the North-Eastern Dialect of Scotland. *Johnny Gibb o' Gushetneuk* is a subject of serious and absorbing study on the banks of the Rhine. Any Scotchman properly trained has immense advantages over a foreigner in the investigation of his own language, and it is a reproach to our scholarship that Sir James Murray's treatise on Border Scotch is still, after thirty-five years' interval, almost *sui generis*.

The Committee seek to formulate a scheme which will keep individual investigators in touch with each other, and which will accomplish by general effort what would be impossible for individuals unless they had both ample leisure and money to devote to the work. The dialects are undoubtedly giving way before the influence of general education and modern means of communication. List 1, issued by the Committee, contains 346 Scotch words, excluding words peculiar to Orkney and Shetland. Two records from Forfarshire show 145 and 130 surviving. One record from Aberdeen has 158, two from Banffshire have 141 and 166 respectively. The contributors are all of middle age or above, but records from the younger generation would be very much less productive. So far as pronunciation and vocabulary are concerned, then, delay is fatal.

The Committee are issuing lists of Scottish words having the same vowel sound in the accented syllable in one or more of the Scottish Dialects. List 1 contains the words that have the peculiar vowel which has been identified sometimes with the vowel in the French word *pur*, and sometimes with that in the French *peur*. Most words of known origin that contain this vowel or its variant are derived from O.E. and Scandinavian words having $\bar{o}$ in the accented syllable, or from French words having *u*, e. g. *guid* and *excuse*. The words are arranged in the first instance according to the consonant sound that follows the accented vowel. The reason for this arrangement is that the consonant next the vowel very often determines its line of development, e. g. in the 'k' list in many districts you find a *ew* sound instead of the French vowel, as in *beuk*, *heuk*, &c. The grouping of such words will often show at a glance peculiarities of dialect.

In order to secure as wide an interest as possible, the committee propose to *have three classes of correspondents*. The *first class* will comprise all those who have no desire to define the pronunciation,

but are willing to indicate the words that still exist in their dialect and the words which have not hitherto been recorded. They, as well as our other correspondents, are asked to underline the words in the lists that are *not now* used in the form of Scotch they are familiar with. Care must be taken to discriminate between the spoken Scotch of the district and words known only in books.

If a word is not heard in the locality, it should not be entered in the list, even if backed by the authority of Burns. Old people resident all their life in one parish or district would form the best subjects for investigation, as words might be caught from them unknown to the younger generation. The dialect described should be that of a small area, such as a parish, glen, or little town. The county is too large, as it often includes two different dialects, e.g. Kincardine or Dumfries. The Committee will supply all their correspondents with printed slips on which to register words and meanings unrecorded in any dictionary. When it is practicable, Jamieson's or Wright's Dictionary should be consulted to ascertain if the matter is really new. Members who have any influence on local library committees should persuade them to buy Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary*—now being offered at half-price, £7 10*s*. —which, besides being useful for this special purpose, is a veritable mine of information and curious lore.

The second class of correspondents are those who, without any expert knowledge of speech sounds, are yet keenly interested in dialect and would be glad to indicate the pronunciation roughly if they were not bound to use a peculiar alphabet. These correspondents may use normalized Scotch vowel-spellings, of which a simple description will be issued, probably with each new word-list. In a normalized spelling we select one of the many ways of representing a sound and abide by it for all words. The vowel sound in modern English 'do' is written variously in Scotch as oo, ow, ou, &c. Of these 'oo' alone would be employed in all words where the sound occurs. The diphthong in modern English *house* would be represented by *ow*, while the vowel in modern English *but* would have *u* as its sign. Correspondents could thus make clear if such a word as *pound* was pronounced *pun*, *poon*, or *pown* by writing one of these spellings opposite the printed word in the column.

For a more exact description of the sound, the Committee would have to refer to their third class of correspondents, viz. those who have some phonetic training. The lecturers in Phonetics in the Edinburgh and Dundee Training Centres, Miss Robson and Mr. Jackson, have joined the Committee and are trying to enlist

the services of the best of their students in this investigation. With their help, the Committee hope to dot the country with correspondents who have an expert knowledge of sounds. Each lecturer will, provisionally at least, act as organizer for his or her Centre, and make sure that the symbols used have the same value for all contributors in that district. Through the medium of this Association, they might call occasional meetings for their own districts to discuss details and report progress. The lecturers and those responsible for the districts might meet in committee and compare notes, and in this way a uniform description of the sounds would be possible—one not open to the same objections as might be urged against former attempts. The phonetic correspondents will write the phonetic characters opposite each word in the printed list. When there is no change of consonants, often a single vowel symbol will be sufficient. The organic description of the sounds and the Sweet-Bell symbols, at least for the vowels, are considered the best for use in dialect work.

Those who will not undertake to mark the pronunciation must remember that they can help by merely underlining non-existing words and sending by means of the slips a note of new words or meanings in any spelling with which they are familiar. In this connexion much assistance might be got from country literary societies, Burns Clubs, country ministers and schoolmasters, who might, at least, forward to the Committee the names of people with special local knowledge. The columns of the country newspaper might also be utilized to draw forth information about local words, phrases, and place-names. The last often contain pronunciations that have fallen out of general use in the district. The wider the interest, the better chance of gathering in new material.

The Committee cannot carry out this scheme without money. Financial assistance is required, (1) for printing the word lists just now, and the results of our inquiry later on; (2) for providing a fund to pay the travelling expenses of those who are responsible for the organization of the different districts. The first of these is the more pressing. The English Association has generously voted a sum to start the work, and it is hoped that an application to the Carnegie Trust will bring some assistance.

On the reception of the first two lists will depend to a large extent the future procedure of the Committee. If the results are scanty, they would hesitate to expend more money or time in making up and printing other lists. The investigation would, in that event, be probably limited to an attempt to define the dialect areas. The

results would have great phonetic and philological interest, yet would not be so complete as if they had formed a part of the larger scheme. The Committee would respectfully submit that it is incumbent on the Association, seeing that it is embarked on this venture, to do what it can to make it a success. Members whose knowledge of Scotch is too scanty to enable them to fill up our lists, might hand their copies to those interested in dialect study or send the names of such persons to the Convener[1], or recommend the objects of the inquiry to patriotic and literary societies and to county clubs in our large towns. They might even induce these bodies to vote a money subsidy to defray the expenses of publication.

Even if they fail in their wider scheme, the Committee may have the consolation of having roused an interest in the subject that will not die down till English speech, or more particularly that form of it known as Northern Anglian or Scottish, receives proper treatment from our Universities, and a new Scottish Dictionary is published that will be an honour to Scottish scholarship and a seemly tribute of respect to our national past.

'For gude begynning and hardy
And it be followit wittily
May ger oftsiss onlikely thing
Cum to right fair and just endyng.'

BARBOUR.

[1] Mr. W. Grant, Ashfield, Cults, Aberdeenshire.

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